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South Africa: The African National Congress in the 1980s

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An Intelligence Assessment

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South Africa: The African National Congress in the 1980s

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An Intelligence Assessment

*Information available as of 26 February 1982
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This assessment was prepared by [redacted]
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Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and
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**South Africa: The
African National Congress
in the 1980s**

Key Judgments

The African National Congress (ANC), the principal South African insurgent group, will probably continue to increase its terrorist activities over the next few years, although the resulting racial violence in South Africa probably will not immediately or directly threaten the survival of the white government. Racial violence, however, will contribute to the growing polarization of the white community, marked most recently by the split in the ruling Afrikaner National Party.

Pretoria will respond by attacking ANC installations in neighboring countries and by exerting increased economic, political, and even military pressure against black governments that permit the ANC to operate from their territories. The heightened tensions in the region will offer the Soviet Union opportunities for expanding its influence in southern Africa and will make it more difficult than it has been for the United States and the West to maintain good relations with both Pretoria and the black African states.

The Soviet Union and its allies are the main backers of the ANC and provide almost all of its military equipment and training. Most members get their military training in Angola from Soviet and Cuban instructors. Particularly promising recruits are sent to the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and Cuba for academic, political, and military training. Moscow also has significant influence within the ANC through the South African Communist Party. Communist party members, many of whom are not black, hold a large number of the important positions in the ANC.

The repressive security and political measures employed by Pretoria in response to the increase in terrorist activities have discredited moderate black leaders who oppose the ANC. There is today no effective spokesman inside South Africa who can realistically claim to have the allegiance of the black community, and the ANC is having increasing success in filling this leadership vacuum. Although the ANC apparently does not yet have an extensive underground political network inside South Africa, it is rapidly gaining influence among blacks, particularly in labor unions and student movements.

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April 1982

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Militants are gaining more control over the group's policies and tactics and are pushing for a more aggressive terrorist campaign. The new military commander, Thabo Mbeki, believes that the ANC should no longer attempt to avoid casualties when carrying out terrorist operations. Mbeki also believes that the group should stage more operations out of Botswana and seek more support in the black homelands.

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South Africa: The African National Congress in the 1980s

Origins and Development of the ANC

The ANC, the oldest Western-style black African movement and one of the oldest of all South African political organizations, was founded in 1912 by a small group of educated black professionals and tribal chiefs. The ANC's stated mission was to unite blacks in defense of their rights and privileges, but during its early history the group did little to organize opposition to the government's racial policies. It was not until the late 1940s that the group, under the leadership of dynamic young black nationalists such as Nelson Mandela, took charge of the fight for black political rights in South Africa. Mandela's attempts to force government attention to black demands by engaging in civil disobedience were unsuccessful; and, after being outlawed by Pretoria in 1960, the ANC launched an underground military campaign to overthrow the government.

The ANC's decision to pursue a military solution in South Africa was premature given its lack of public support and trained personnel. By 1963 Pretoria's security forces had succeeded in rounding up most of the underground leaders, including Mandela. In 1964 Mandela and seven other ANC leaders were sentenced to life imprisonment while other ANC officials fled into exile.

It took the group almost 20 years to recover from the imprisonment of its leadership and the destruction of its organizational structure inside South Africa. The ANC did not begin to revive until after the suppression of the Soweto riots of 1976, when several thousand black youths emigrated from South Africa to neighboring black states and many of them joined the ANC. This was the first significant influx of new recruits into the organization since the early 1960s. In addition, the newly independent black states of Mozambique and Angola provided the ANC with access to staging and training areas and facilitated the provision of Soviet aid to the organization.



Figure 1. Nelson Mandela, detained leader of the African National Congress

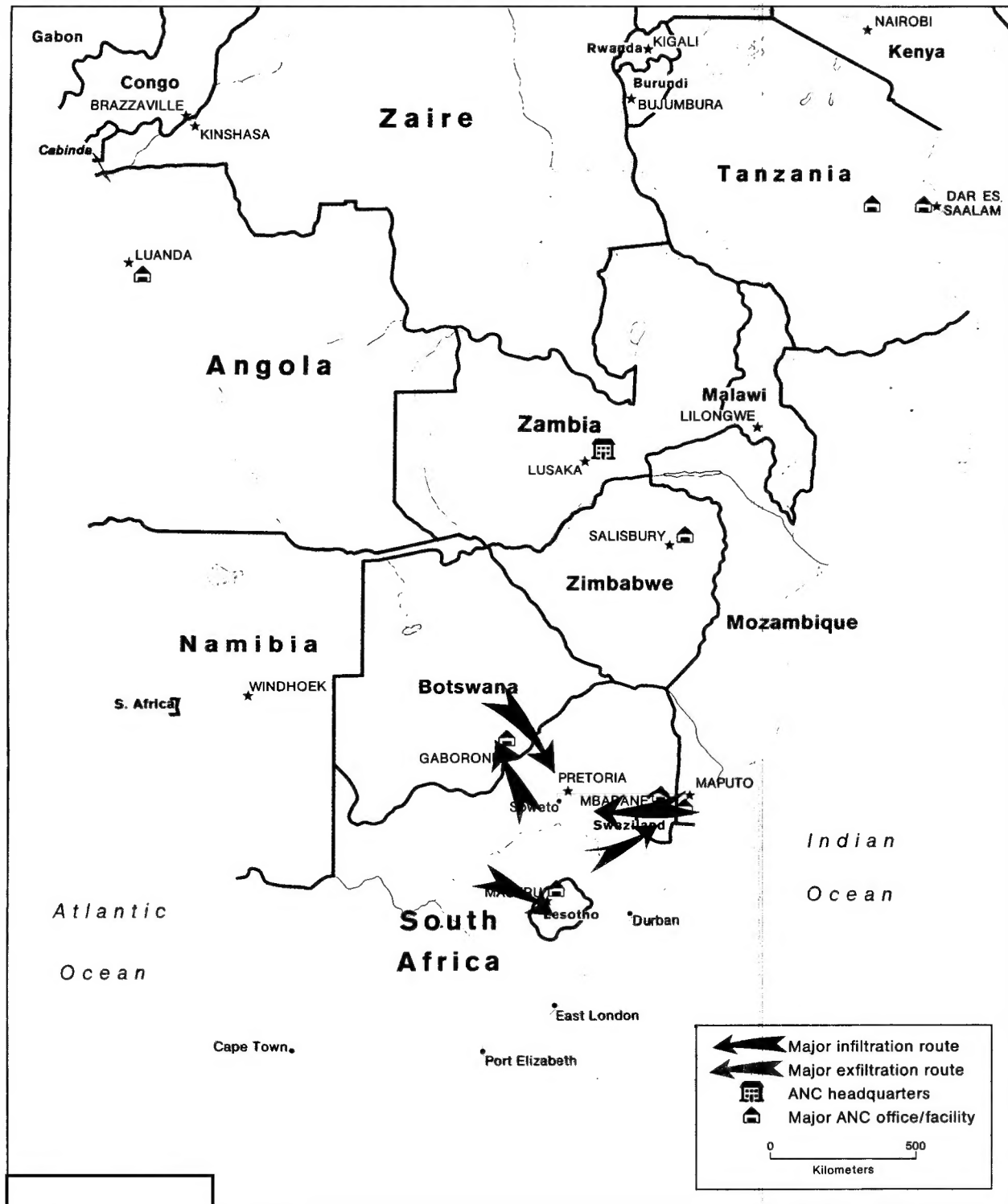
By the beginning of 1980, the ANC was conducting modest terrorist operations in South Africa. The hostage-taking incident at a suburban Pretoria bank that January and the sabotage in June of the South African Coal, Oil, and Gas Corporation (Sasol) synthetic fuel plants, however, shocked the white community. Whites steeled themselves against a predicted terrorist offensive, security measures were tightened, and Pretoria stepped up its cross-border operations against ANC targets.

The remainder of 1980 was relatively quiet, but 1981 saw the expected increase in ANC activity. Although no individual terrorist incident matched the magnitude of the Sasol sabotage attempt, the ANC was consistently able to strike at economic and government targets. During 1981 the ANC was responsible for over 40 major incidents, compared to less than 10 during 1980. On several occasions, bombs exploded simultaneously in different parts of the country, indicating improved efficiency and coordination of the group's operations. Targets included power stations, rail lines, military and police facilities, and government offices. Most bombs were set to explode either early in the morning or late at night, when urban

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Figure 2
African National Congress (ANC) in Southern Africa



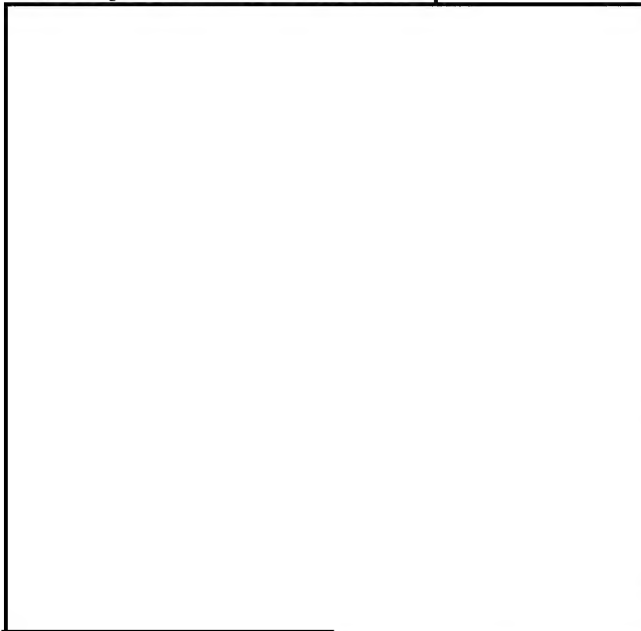
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targets were not crowded. Given the level of its terrorist activity inside the country last year, it is clear that the ANC could have inflicted a large number of white casualties if it had chosen to do so. [REDACTED]

Methods of Operation

Mozambique has been the primary staging area for ANC operations into South Africa. [REDACTED]



[REDACTED] The nature and pattern of terrorist attacks strongly suggest that many ANC teams complete their missions as planned and without incident. They have often eluded South African security dragnets and escaped into Swaziland, Lesotho, or other neighboring states. These terrorists now form a core group of experienced and disciplined ANC members. [REDACTED]

Encouraged by its relative success last year, the ANC is now attempting to establish a permanent presence in South Africa. Much of this effort appears concentrated in the black homelands, which, because of their overcrowding and poverty and their less efficient security police, may eventually become staging areas for a rurally based insurgency. [REDACTED]

In recent months, South African officials have become increasingly concerned about the growing ANC presence in areas such as Transkei, KwaZulu, Bophuthatswana, Venda, and Gazankulu. Unusually

The ANC in Africa

The ANC today probably has 1,000 to 2,000 active members, defined as those individuals living outside South Africa who have received military training. In addition, there may be as many as 2,000 to 3,000 other ANC members, including young students, women, older people, and blacks, inside South Africa who secretly belong to the organization.

Most new ANC recruits are blacks leaving South Africa for neighboring states. The organization may attract 100 to 300 new members a year.

The ANC's principal training base is in Angola, where members receive military and terrorist training from Cuban and Soviet instructors, and probably East German personnel as well. The Soviets provide the group with almost all of its military equipment. This consists for the most part of small arms and explosives, although the ANC has employed 122-mm rockets in South Africa and may also possess SAM-7 hand-held, surface-to-air missiles.

ANC headquarters are in Lusaka, Zambia. Tanzania is the site of the main nonmilitary ANC camp. [REDACTED]

Most ANC operations into South Africa are staged from Mozambique. [REDACTED]

The group has camps in northern Mozambique and several transit facilities and safehouses in the south.

The ANC has a representative in Zimbabwe. Although Salisbury does not condone the use of its territory for staging terrorist operations, ANC members are beginning to infiltrate from Zimbabwe into South Africa.

The ANC also has representatives in Botswana, Swaziland, and Lesotho. None of these governments officially allow the group to use their territory for terrorist purposes, but the ANC often succeeds in circumventing such restrictions.

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large groups of ANC members, at times numbering as many as 20, have been reported in these homelands, and terrorists have taken refuge there after completing operations in white areas. [REDACTED]

Of the more than 40 major terrorist incidents last year, over half took place either in or within 100 kilometers of a black homeland. Although this figure in part reflects the proximity of these territories to white urban centers, it also probably indicates that the ANC is increasingly selecting targets that are easily accessible from a homeland area. ANC terrorist teams that find temporary haven in the homelands are now beginning to remain in the country for longer periods of time, sometimes carrying out several assignments before finally leaving South Africa. [REDACTED]

Militants Gaining Control

The growing power of militants in the ANC leadership may lead to even more important changes in the group's strategy. Since going into exile in the early 1960s, the ANC has been led by veteran black activists such as President Oliver Tambo, 64, and Secretary General Alfred Nzo, 56. Many of the young militant blacks who joined the ANC after the Soweto riots were dismayed by the fact that their leaders were for the most part aging men who spent their time traveling from one world capital to another. The militants also deplored what they believed to be their leaders' excessively careful approach to military activities inside South Africa. [REDACTED]

Many of these members have been seeking a way to gain control of the organization for some time. During the first half of 1981, rumors began to circulate in African capitals of an impending major shakeup in the ANC leadership. Several of the group's top executives, including Alfred Nzo and military commander Joe Modise, were accused by younger members of inefficiency, corruption, cowardice, and even of working for the South African security services. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Alfred Nzo apparently escaped any significant retribution, but the military commander, Joe Modise, was replaced by Thabo Mbeki, a militant black nationalist who had until then been President Tambo's personal secretary. [REDACTED]

Mbeki, who is probably in his late thirties, is the son of one of the ANC "heroes" imprisoned with Mandela on Robben Island, South Africa's maximum security prison. In the late 1970s, Mbeki was a member of the young militant group that wanted to replace Tambo as ANC president. Since then Mbeki apparently has made his peace with Tambo, but his views on ANC strategy and tactics are much closer to the aggressive positions preferred by the militants than to those of Tambo's generation. [REDACTED]

Mbeki does not believe that the ANC should strive to minimize civilian casualties while carrying out its terrorist operations inside South Africa. The new military commander believes that the ANC's meticulous preparation for missions is counterproductive [REDACTED]

Although Mbeki holds the title of military commander, he does not have full control over ANC operations. Main responsibility for terrorist activities has been for years in the hands of Joe Slovo, a white Communist and the ANC's chief military planner, who designed most of the tactics Mbeki now criticizes. Unlike his predecessor, however, Mbeki not only does not intend to defer to Slovo, but also wants to assume most of Slovo's responsibilities. [REDACTED]

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Figure 4. Dr. Yusuf Dadoo,
chairman of the South African
Communist Party [redacted]



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Communists also wield influence in the ANC through the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), a Communist front organization. SACTU is formally affiliated with the ANC, and, along with the SACP, helps funnel Soviet funds to the insurgent group. Steven Dlamini, a top SACTU executive, is also an SACP member. [redacted]

The ANC's Communists and the Soviets

The one faction within the ANC that may be the most affected by the increasing influence of black militants in the leadership is the South African Communist Party (SACP). The SACP has been associated with the ANC for several decades. In 1969 the ANC opened its membership to all races, and since then many SACP leaders, who include whites, Coloreds, and Asians, have also held important executive positions in the ANC. [redacted]

Joe Slovo is only one of several influential Communists in the ANC. Many SACP members belong to the National Executive Committee, the ANC's governing structure, and Communists dominate the Revolutionary Council, the administrative body that supervises the ANC's military operations. Influential SACP members who belong to one or both of these leadership groups include Yusuf Dadoo, the SACP chairman; Slovo; Moses Mabhida, chief of the Revolutionary Council and Secretary General of the SACP; and Reg September, a Colored activist. [redacted]

This Communist connection has been important for the ANC and was one of the major reasons for the group's survival during the difficult years of the 1960s and 1970s. Soon after the ANC went into exile, the Soviet Union, which has close relations with both the SACP and SACTU, began providing assistance to the ANC. Moscow believes that for the time being the SACP's goal—a Communist South African state—must be secondary to the ANC's objective of black majority rule. The Soviets and their allies now supply the ANC with most of its military equipment, and promising recruits are sent to the Soviet Union, East European countries, and Cuba for advanced academic, political, and military training. [redacted]

Despite the benefits the African National Congress has drawn from its relations with the SACP and the Soviet Union, many black militants have resented the control that whites and Communists have had over the ANC. In the late 1950s, in fact, a large number of blacks split from the group—and later founded the rival Pan-Africanist Congress—because they disagreed with the ANC's multiracial philosophy and its

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emerging Marxist slant. They believed that the struggle in South Africa was between blacks and whites, and not between economic classes. Many ANC militants still define the South African problem exclusively in racial terms. Some, for example, believe that Slovo's reluctance to authorize ANC operations that endanger civilians is due to his desire to spare fellow whites. [REDACTED]

The appointment of Mbeki to replace the former military commander Modise—who is an SACP member—was probably initially resisted by Communists in the ANC executive. The SACP, however, probably realizes that eventually it will have to accommodate and preferably win over the militants if it is to maintain effective influence in the ANC leadership. To that end, the party in recent years has increased its recruitment of blacks. Slovo's recent statements are another indication of the SACP's intention to adapt to the growing militancy of the ANC membership. [REDACTED]

Mbeki and other militants are aware that the ANC cannot remain effective for long without Moscow's backing. They also realize that young South African blacks—potential ANC recruits—are becoming more politically sophisticated, and increasingly are discussing the relevance of Marxism to their situation. New ANC recruits, therefore, may be more favorably disposed to the SACP's role in the organization. [REDACTED]

Reaching for the Black Mandate

ANC activities will pose a serious threat to white control only if the group develops an effective underground political organization inside South Africa. For most of the past two decades, there have been few indications that the ANC had even the beginnings of such a network. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, politicized blacks supported Steve Biko's Black Consciousness Movement—which called on them to unite and become self-reliant—instead of the ANC. [REDACTED]

Pretoria subsequently cracked down on Biko's movement and its leaders, but by 1978 the government seemed to have opened a new chapter in black-white politics by talking publicly of the need for significant

racial reform. A new group of black leaders emerged, such as Zulu Chief Buthelezi and Dr. Nthato Motlana of the Soweto Committee of Ten, who began to voice the notion of cooperating with a "progressive" government. The ANC in exile could not compete with this mood of cautious optimism. By 1978 Buthelezi and his organization Inkatha, according to one West European survey, were able to outpoll the ANC as the most popular black political movement. [REDACTED]

Pretoria's failure to implement any significant political reforms, however, soon began to erode the popularity of these leaders. Buthelezi and other blacks who gambled on the South African Government's good intentions were discredited in the eyes of their politicized black constituency. Few blacks are now willing to accept leadership roles involving cooperation with the government, and no one inside South Africa can claim to have the allegiance of the black community. The ANC, with increasing success, is filling this leadership vacuum. [REDACTED]

The ANC has been aided in its efforts to acquire political influence inside South Africa by some of the economic reforms instituted by Pretoria. Blacks, for example, can now join legally recognized labor unions. The government had hoped to limit the unions to strictly economic activities, but, because they are the only effective organization afforded blacks, these unions have begun to delve into political and community affairs as well. Blacks who support the ANC or are perhaps secret members of the organization are the leaders of some of the more radical unions, particularly those operating in the eastern Cape Province. Company managers complain that ANC activists are inciting their workers to strike. In 1981 the South African Government and homeland authorities arrested over 300 union activists and may be planning to charge many of them with supporting ANC terrorist activities. [REDACTED]

Another indicator of the ANC's growing political influence inside South Africa is the group's recent ability to overcome tribal animosities and to operate in Natal Province, where the Zulu homeland is

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located. The ANC traditionally has had a large number of Xhosa members, and it has significant support in the eastern Cape Province where most Xhosas live. The Zulus—historically at odds with the Xhosas—had not supported ANC activities in the past, but last year over a dozen terrorist incidents occurred in Natal. Radical Zulu youths are abandoning Buthelezi in favor of the ANC, and the group reportedly is increasing its influence in the rural areas of the homeland. [redacted]

The growing signs of ANC political activity in South Africa mark the reversal of an almost 20-year trend. Nonetheless, the ANC has a long way to go before it can claim an effective political network inside the country. The current lull in terrorist activity in Natal following the arrest of a small group of ANC members responsible for many of the recent bombings indicates that the group does not yet have a widespread organizational base. Recent polls show that the ANC is now the most popular black movement among South African blacks, but most of that support represents blacks who applaud the ANC's activities but who do not personally want to get involved. [redacted]

Outlook

Short-Term Prospects.

[redacted] If Mbeki succeeds in consolidating his authority, more whites are likely to be victims of ANC operations. The group's increasing use of the black homelands, its improving and more sophisticated capabilities, the emergence of a new generation of aggressive leaders, and growing political influence inside South Africa will make it more difficult and costly for Pretoria to control ANC activities. [redacted]

The ANC continues to face several problems that significantly hinder its effectiveness. Black South African agents continue to penetrate the ANC. In addition, neighboring states that allow the ANC to operate from their territories are under constant economic, political, and even military pressure from

Pretoria. ANC facilities in these states are highly vulnerable to South African military operations, such as the raid in January 1981 [redacted] in Mozambique. South African pressure often results—even if only temporarily—in black governments placing restrictions on the group's activities in their countries. These difficulties, along with the continuous problem of evading police forces inside South Africa, tax the morale of ANC members. [redacted]

Long-Term Strategy. The ANC's leaders realize that the organization cannot hope to defeat the white government in Pretoria by force of arms alone. They also believe, however, that it is foolhardy for blacks to hope that South African whites will voluntarily discard a system of social, economic, and political control that provides them with one of the world's highest standards of living. ANC leaders believe that whites will not face up to the need for change until their lives, property, and security are threatened. [redacted]

The leaders of the ANC hope that terrorism—by unnerving the whites—will eventually compel Pretoria to negotiate directly with the ANC on sharing political power. The strength and determination of white South African society, however, make this unlikely for the foreseeable future. The growing number of terrorist incidents, coupled with increasing ANC influence in labor unions and other black movements, is more likely to lead to more persistent and widespread racial unrest. Pretoria probably will respond with more repressive measures at home and more frequent military operations against ANC facilities in neighboring states. At the same time, increasing violence in South Africa will further polarize the white community into those who believe racial reform spells suicide and those who believe it is essential. [redacted]

The ANC leaders, particularly the Communists among them, probably believe that the organization's interests are best served by continued repressive government policies, which will tend to radicalize the black community. Meanwhile, moderate blacks who oppose the ANC's ideology and methods will continue

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Other Black Insurgent Groups

Although the ANC is by far the most influential and active black insurgent organization, there are several other black groups in exile, albeit small and ineffective, that are committed to a campaign of violence against the South African white minority regime. The two of any importance are the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) and the South African Youth Revolutionary Council (SAYRCO).

The PAC, which broke away from the ANC in the late 1950s, has long been plagued with organizational problems and leadership disputes. The group probably has less than 1,000 members. It has not conducted any significant activity inside South Africa for several years; since 1978 its various leaders have been solely and—for the most part—unsuccessfully preoccupied with consolidating their authority. Its current leader, John Pokela—who escaped from South Africa in 1981 after being released from Robben Island—does appear, however, to be turning more of his attention to the development of an effective insurgent capability.

The PAC'S plans to conduct a rural insurgency inside South Africa are hampered by insufficient manpower, inadequate external support, and lack of access to staging areas in neighboring black states. The PAC attracted very few of the young blacks who left South Africa after the Soweto riots, and thus did not benefit from an infusion of new recruits.

China stopped providing the PAC with military assistance in the late 1970s when leadership disputes threatened to destroy the organization. Although the PAC claims that China recently agreed to provide some military training, Beijing probably is still waiting for Pokela to prove himself before committing any

significant support. [redacted]

Most black nations have refused to give the PAC the same access to their territories that the ANC enjoys. Most PAC members live in Tanzania. The PAC has offices in Botswana, but has little access to Mozambique and Swaziland. The Zimbabwean Government gives PAC somewhat more support, perhaps because Prime Minister Mugabe and Pokela are said to be longtime friends, but even this backing has so far been largely rhetorical.

The Organization of African Unity for several years has been urging the PAC to reunite with the ANC, and some PAC members privately argue in favor of such a merger. Most of the PAC leadership, however, would prefer to develop an effective terrorist capability inside South Africa before considering such a step. If the PAC rejoined the ANC in the near future, it would probably be swallowed by the larger organization and PAC leaders would have little influence over ANC tactics or ideology.

The South African Youth Revolutionary Council was formed by radical blacks who fled South Africa after the Soweto riots, but found the ANC to be too moderate. Little was heard from SAYRCO until last year when several of its members, including its leader, infiltrated into South Africa with the intention of starting a terrorist offensive against "anyone who supports Pretoria," including US businessmen and diplomats inside South Africa. Security forces, however, quickly rounded up the inexperienced group, and the organization—which probably has less than 100 members—is unlikely to recover soon from this setback.

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to be discredited. Pretoria's persistence in declaring impoverished and overpopulated homelands independent will further antagonize blacks and will provide the ANC with more bases from which to operate. Economic reforms, in the absence of any significant movement on the question of political rights, will heighten black demands for change. Indeed, "middle class" blacks, along with better-off Coloreds and Asians, are the most politicized and critical strata of South African society. [REDACTED]

Regional Impact. The South African Government will respond to a significant increase in terrorist activity by directly punishing neighboring states that support the ANC. These states, however, will be unwilling or unable to wholly control ANC activities on their territories. Even if black governments were determined to control the ANC, many sympathetic lower level officials would, as they do now, turn a blind eye to the group's activities. [REDACTED]

Actions of South Africa against its neighbors risk pushing countries such as Zambia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Botswana closer to the Soviet Union. The Soviets have already had considerable success in increasing their influence in Botswana by playing on Gaborone's fears of South African aggression. Moscow will respond to the ANC's growing effectiveness by increasing its material assistance to the group. In addition, as Moscow increases its influence with black governments, the Soviets will be in a better position to aid ANC activities directly. The large Soviet Embassy staff in Botswana, for example, probably is already covertly assisting efforts of the ANC to expand its presence in Botswana. [REDACTED]

Implications for the United States

The rise in violence in South Africa will probably be gradual, with increasingly serious implications for US interests both in the region and internationally. Specifically, racial violence in South Africa will increase the risks and costs of constructive engagement with Pretoria. The United States and other Western nations that have close ties with South Africa will be frequently attacked in international forums such as the UN. [REDACTED]

US and Western interests inside South Africa will also be directly threatened by heightened racial tensions. High-visibility multinational corporations operating in South Africa will become targets for labor strikes and even terrorist operations. If the ANC embarks on a more violent terrorist campaign, US businessmen and diplomats could be personally threatened, particularly if blacks believe—as many already do—that the United States tacitly supports the policies of the South African Government. Radical blacks will be critical of any US dealings with Pretoria, making it increasingly difficult for the United States to maintain contacts with the black community. [REDACTED]

Regional US interests will also be threatened by increasing violence both inside South Africa and in neighboring countries. Moscow and its allies will seek to portray US relations with Pretoria as proof that the United States supports South African military aggression against neighboring states. In an increasingly polarized racial situation, the United States will find it more difficult to maintain good relations with both black African states and the white South African Government. [REDACTED]

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